U.S. and Canada Committee of Advisors
to the
Great Lakes Fishery Commission

Resolution 26-01: A Resolution Calling for the Inclusion of Microplastics as a Chemical of Mutual Concern in the Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement, to Protect the Great Lakes Fishery

WHEREAS the binational Great Lakes fishery generates USD$5.1 billion (CAD$6.9 billion) in economic output each year, directly supports 75,000 jobs in addition to hundreds of thousands of jobs related to tourism, navigation, and more, and supplies drinking water to approximately 40 million people[1];

WHEREAS plastic pollution—accumulation of synthetic polymer products that do not readily degrade in the environment—is one of the most pressing environmental issues globally and is widespread throughout the Great Lakes, entering the environment through diverse pathways, and has been found in water, air, soil, and biota;

WHEREAS researchers estimate that nearly 10,000 metric tons (22 million pounds) of plastic pollution is entering the Great Lakes every year from the U.S. and Canada[2];

WHEREAS microplastics—plastic pollution 5 mm or less in size—come from myriad sources, including but not limited to the breakdown of larger plastics into smaller pieces (e.g., bottles, rope, etc.), release during plastic manufacturing (e.g., nurdles or plastic-containing wastewater), and release during the use of plastic products (e.g., synthetic clothing and vehicle tires);

Whereas microplastics are mistaken for food by organisms throughout the aquatic food web, where they can cause physical blockages, internal damage, and serve as a pathway for toxic pollutants to enter the food web and contaminate the fish and wildlife we eat;

Whereas a review of Great Lakes microplastic in fish showed that 28 fish species collected from all five Great Lakes were contaminated with a wide variety of microplastic shapes and polymers. The species tested included fish such as lake trout, rainbow trout and yellow perch, and the contamination levels were among the highest reported worldwide for fish.[3]

WHEREAS while sampling for plastics and microplastics has been conducted in the Great Lakes, significant data gaps remain, and the scope, scale, and complexity of plastic pollution would benefit significantly from more research to

[1] National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. (n.d.). *Great Lakes ecoregion.* https://www.noaa.gov/education/resource-collections/freshwater/great-lakes-ecoregion

[2] Hoffman, M. J., & Hittinger, E. (2017). Inventory and transport of plastic debris in the Laurentian Great Lakes. *Marine Pollution Bulletin, 115*(1–2), 273–281. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.marpolbul.2016.11.057

[3] International Joint Commission, Great Lakes Science Advisory Board Work Group on Microplastics. (2024). *Final report of the IJC Great Lakes Science Advisory Board Work Group on Microplastics: Monitoring, ecological risk assessment, and management of microplastics in the Laurentian Great Lakes.* International Joint Commission. https://ijc.org/sites/default/files/SAB_MicroplasticsReport_2024.pdf

investigate the impacts throughout the environment and potential links to understand human and environmental health effects;

WHEREAS successfully addressing plastic pollution requires the Great Lakes basin states and provinces, and federal governments, to adopt a comprehensive approach addressing the full lifecycle of all plastics, whether in consumer packaging or in products, from extraction to end of life;

WHEREAS the United States and Canada entered into the Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement (GLWQA) in 1972 to cooperate on the protection and restoration of the Great Lakes;

WHEREAS through the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and Canada Water Agency, the two governments have led work covering multiple subjects, including Chemicals of Mutual Concern (CMC), which was included in the GLWQA in 2012;

WHEREAS the International Joint Commission (IJC) has studied microplastics in the Great Lakes and made the recommendation to "consider microplastics for inclusion as a Chemical of Mutual Concern under Annex 3 of the Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement to support the development and implementation of a coordinated action plan for reducing microplastic pollution in the Great Lakes";

WHEREAS the U.S. and Canadian Committee of Advisors has been concerned with the threat of plastic pollution to the Great Lakes and its fisheries since calling for a binational ban on plastic microbeads added to personal care products in 2014,

WHEREAS following the release of an assessment of plastic pollution showing that plastic is polluting rivers, lakes, and oceans, harming wildlife and humans, and generating microplastics in drinking water, [4] the Government of Canada developed regulations prohibiting single-use plastics (e.g., straws, cutlery, foodservice ware, plastic checkout bags) as part of a comprehensive plan to meet its target of zero plastic waste by 2030;

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the U.S. and Canadian Committees of Advisors stress the crucial need for a coordinated, basin-wide approach to reducing plastic pollution in the Great Lakes, including research, monitoring, assessment, management, prevention, and remediation;

THEREFORE, BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Advisors encourage the two federal governments, eight Great Lakes states, and two Canadian provinces to be proactive in implementing measures to further prevent plastics from entering the Great Lakes through a combination of science and research, policy innovation, education and outreach, and market-based and regulatory instruments;

THEREFORE, BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Advisors urge the Great Lakes Fishery Commission to prioritize research on impacts to Great Lakes fish from microplastics;

THEREFORE, BE IT FINALLY RESOLVED that the Advisors fully support the inclusion of microplastics as a Chemical of Mutual Concern under Annex 3 of the Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement.

U.S. and Canadian Committees of Advisors
Passed unanimously June 3, 2026

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[4] Environment and Climate Change Canada & Health Canada. (2020). *Science assessment of plastic pollution* (Cat. No. En14-424/2020E-PDF; ISBN 978-0-660-35897-0). Government of Canada. https://www.canada.ca/en/environment-climate-change/services/evaluating-existing-substances/science-assessment-plastic-pollution.html